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AUTHOR Williams, Robert E.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Four studies were conducted examining aspects of the social-emotional development of learning disabled elementary and secondary aged individuals. Results of the studies showed that learning disabled (LD) Ss had significantly lower self-concepts than non-learning disabled (NLD) subjects, but did not show significantly greater discrepancy between self- and ideal self-concepts; were significantly more internal with respect to locus of control for intellectual achievement, but were significantly more external with respect to failure in intellectual achievement; and showed no differences in comparison with NLD subjects in levels of masculinity and levels of femininity. Results suggested that though differences in social-emotional problems of LD adolescents exist, they may not be as pervasive as is commonly believed. (Author/CL)

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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
OF THE LEARNING DISABLED

ROBERT E. WILLIAMS

JOHN P. GAA

DOV LIBERMAN

University of Houston/University Park

Gila Arnoni

Indiana State University

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Within the last ten years the concept of learning disabilities has gained importance as an explanatory mechanism in relation to individuals who have problems in encoding, processing, retrieving, and/or producing information. While this concept has resulted in a better understanding of the problems encountered by such individuals, its developmental antecedents and consequences are far from clear. Much work has been done examining influences of learning disabilities upon achievement, remediation strategies and retention, but less has been done which relates to the developmental component. Indeed, with respect to social-emotional development, very little empirical data is available.

Those who work with learning disabled (LD) students report that many of the students seem to demonstrate anger, frustration, lower levels of self concept, and a feeling that they will have difficulty achieving no matter how much they try. Additionally, there is often concern expressed that identity development during adolescence may be negatively affected. Although there is some data to support effects relating to social-emotional development, most of the assumptions concerning such effects continue to be based upon anecdotal observations. Further, these observations most often do not involve

comparisons of LD and non learning (NLD) individuals, making it unclear whether observed problems are more extreme than are those observed in NLD students.

In order to address these issues concerning social emotional development of LD individuals, a series of research studies was conducted. Each of the four studies investigated a different aspect of social emotional development.

The first study, entitled Self and Ideal Self of Learning Disabled Children - a Preliminary Study, examined the self concepts of LD children as compared to those of NLD children and the degree of congruence between self-ideal-self concept of LD and NLD children. It was hypothesized that :

1. There would be a significantly lower level of self concept in the LD children as compared to the NLD children.
2. There would be a significantly larger discrepancy in congruence of self-ideal-self concept of LD children as compared to NLD children. (Congruence is a measure of a positive emotional adjustment).

The subjects (Ss) for this study were 20 male elementary school children (10 LD and 10 NLD) ranging in age from 10 years, 11 months to 12 years, 1 month. All subjects were of normal intelligence and had not suffered any emotional trauma during the past year. The LD children had been diagnosed as learning disabled according to the State of Texas Regulations. Both groups of subjects were enrolled in private though separate schools.

The Bledsoe Self Concept Scale, which was designed for use with children from ages 7-14, was administered to each subject. This scale consists of thirty adjectives on which the subjects respond to a three

point scale (nearly always, about half the time, and just now and then) for each adjective, first to, "This is the way I am", and second to, "This is the way I would like to be." The presentation of the scale to the subjects was counterbalanced to control for position effect.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with a post hoc discriminant analysis was used to analyze the data for the hypothesized differences between the groups. The results indicated that the groups did not differ significantly. The means and standard deviations of both groups were almost identical in each instance.

Because the results of the study were not in agreement with the published literature concerning LD children and because of concerns such as the nature of self concept measurement, the size of the sample, and the subjects being enrolled in private schools, it was decided that a second study be conducted to examine further these issues.

This study was entitled, A Comparison of the Self and Ideal-Self concepts of Learning Disabled and Non-learning Disabled Children. The hypotheses of this present study were identical to those in the preliminary study. However, the subjects in the second study differed from those of the previous study. Forty (40) 5th and 6th grade males from a public school district in the Houston area were used. Twenty of the subjects were diagnosed as LD according to the State of Texas Regulations and 20 of the subjects were NLD. All subjects ranged in age from 11 years, 0 months to 12 years, 4 months. This age range was specifically selected to maximize the probability that the children had the cognitive capacity to deal with the level of abstraction needed to conceptualize adequately self and ideal self concepts.

Each subject was administered the Bledsoe Self Concept Scale individually by the examiner, with no time limits being imposed. The presentation of the instrument was again counterbalanced to control for position effect.

In the analysis, a one tailed t-test with a significance level of .05 was used to test the two hypotheses. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in level of self concept between the two groups of students. There was a 4.2 point difference between the means, ($t=1.97$) with the LD children showing lower self concepts than the NLD children. A second hypothesis tested in the study concerned the degree of congruence between self and ideal self of LD children and NLD children. The results of the analysis indicated no significant differences between the groups with respect to self and ideal self concept.

While the first two studies in this series considered the self and ideal self concept of LD and NLD children, the third study examined the locus of control orientations of LD adolescents as compared to NLD adolescents. The professional literature seems to indicate that LD adolescents have a greater external locus of control orientation as compared to NLD adolescents thus offering one explanation for some of their social emotional problems. The third study was undertaken in order to examine whether different locus of control (LOC) orientations exist for LD and NLD adolescents across differing domains.

The subjects (Ss) included 91 LD (60 males and 31 females) and 81 NLD (37 males and 44 females) students. All LD Ss attended a private high school for adolescents with learning disabilities, ranged in age from 15 to 18 years and represented all students in grades 9-12. All

of the LD adolescents had been diagnosed as learning disabled according to the State of Texas Regulations although they were heterogeneous with respect to their type and severity of learning disability. The NLD Ss also ranged in age from 15-18 years of age and represented a cross section of students in grades 9-12 in a public high school. This high school services a predominately middle to upper-middle class industrial area, thereby assuring that samples were drawn from similar home backgrounds.

The Locus of Control Inventory in Three Achievement Domains (LOCITAD) developed by Bradley (1977) was used to measure locus of control. The LOCITAD measures perceived acceptance of responsibility for both success and failure in the domains of intellectual, physical and social activities. The instrument provides six subscales scores indicating the degree of internal or external orientation perceived by the individual in relation to success or failure in each of the domains. The LOCITAD is a 47 item instrument which can be read by, or, to the Ss as was the case with those who had reading problems. This instrument was selected because it yields internal and external orientations in three domains instead of one global orientation.

Multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA) were employed to analyze the data. When significant effects were found, Univariate F values were computed. The results indicated the the LD students were significantly more internal than were NLD with respect to success experiences in the intellectual domain but more external with respect to failure experiences. A significant interaction effect between LD and NLD status and sex was also identified for the intellectual domain. LD males were the most external group while NLD males were the most internal of the four groups. This accounted for the

significant interaction on the failure intellectual scale. No significant differences were found between LD and NLD students with respect to success or failure in the social or physical domains, nor were any significant interactions for status by sex found.

These results indicated that the differences between LD and NLD students with respect to LOC may not be as pervasive as the literature might indicate. Several explanations exist for these results, such as the nature of the private school sample, the measurement of LOC by domains rather than globally and the fact that much of the published literature in this area consists of clinical and anecdotal reports rather than of empirical research findings.

The final study in the present series, entitled Sexual Identification of Learning Disabled Adolescents, was initiated because of a growing awareness of the effects of learning disabilities on a wide range of adolescent behavior. Sexual identification of adolescents is an important aspect of social emotional development and very little research with learning disabled adolescents has been completed. The study was designed to examine differences in levels of masculinity and femininity between LD and NLD adolescents and between LD males and LD females.

Ninety students, enrolled in a private school which specializes in working with LD adolescents, served as subjects in this study. This sample included 57 males and 33 females enrolled in grades 9-12, with all but four being 15-18 years of age. Normative data on adolescents, provided by Spence and Helmreich (1978), were used as NLD comparison group scores.

The short form of the Personality Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ), which consists of 24 items, includes eight items from each of three

scales: Masculinity (M), Femininity (F), and Masculinity - Femininity (M-F), was used to determine levels of masculinity and femininity. Administration was in a group setting with several experimenters present to assist those students with reading disabilities.

As would be expected, the results indicated that the LD males scored higher than the female LDs on the M scale while the females scored higher than the males on the F scale. However, LD females showed a significant difference between M and F scores (F higher than M) while the LD males did not. When the LD scores were compared to the normative data from Spence and Helmreich, no significant differences were found in levels of M or F for either males or females.

The finding that significant differences between levels of M and F exist for LD females but not for LD males is potentially important in that males did not demonstrate the degree of differentiation between roles that might have been expected. Although similar results are found in the Spence and Helmreich data, the discrepancy between M and F scores for males was larger than in the present study. Overall, the results indicate that the LD adolescents and the NLD adolescents are very similar with respect to levels of masculinity and femininity. An expanded study directly comparing public school LD and NLD adolescents is currently being planned.

Although case study and anecdotal reports have strongly suggested that learning disabilities may be related to social-emotional development problems in LD adolescents, the results of this series of studies would seem to indicate that although such differences may exist in specific instances, they may not be as pervasive as is commonly believed. Indeed, differences in self concept were to some

extent offset by the lack of differences in discrepancy between self and ideal self concept. Even though locus of control differences exist in specific domains, these differences seem adaptive in nature and limited to areas directly related to the learning disability. That no differences were observed in levels of masculinity and femininity between LD and NLD adolescents indicates that the effects of learning disabilities appear not to generalize to this area of social-emotional development.

Although this series of studies needs to be replicated using LD and NLD students who are enrolled in the same schools (thereby ensuring that the Ss have been exposed to the same or similar social interactions), the traditional perceptions of negative social-emotional development of LD adolescents are certainly now open to question.

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